

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**  
**HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**Species: Otter**

**Region 2**

**Hunting District: Region-Wide**

**Year: 2017**

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Increase the per-trapper harvest quota from 2 to 3 in Region 2.

Prior to 2002, there was no set quota for otter in the Region. Since then, quotas have gradually increased from 13 in 2002 to 20 in 2009 and to 25 in 2014. Quotas have generally filled prior to the season closing date. During the 2016-17 trapping season, 23 of the allowable 25 otter were harvested in Region 2, due at least in part to an apparent decline in beaver trapping activity. (Otter harvest often occurs incidental to beaver trapping.)

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

Otters are not uniformly distributed across the Region. Consequently, some trappers have much more opportunity to harvest otters than others. The objective of this proposed change is to match that otter harvest opportunity with the circumstance and balance the public's demand and with the ability of the resource to sustain a predictable level of harvest opportunity from year to year.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

The success of this proposal will be measured by continued collection of the lower jaws of harvested otters to develop a database for monitoring the sex and age structure of the harvest. Inferences from trends in harvest data will be compared with trapper observations of otter sign in the field and the spatial distribution of harvest and observations over time. The total otter harvest will still be limited to 25 in Region 2; this proposal just allows an additional otter per trapper and may slightly affect the distribution of otter harvest.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

Anecdotal information from trappers, landowners, and recreationists on the waters of Region 2 suggest that otter populations continue to expand. The ratio of juveniles per adult female otter in the harvest in 2015-16 was the highest we've seen since harvest quotas were set in 2002: 3.5 juveniles per adult female. (Ages from the 2016-17 harvest season are not yet available.) This result, combined with a steadily increasing trend in the juvenile: adult female ratio over the past several years suggests a healthy reproductive population of otter.

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Otter often occupy areas enhanced by beaver activity, and beaver populations anecdotally appear to be stable to increasing across Region 2 as well.

- 6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

FWP discussed this matter with the District Two membership of the Montana Trappers Association, who asked for this per-person limit increase at their annual meeting on April 8 in Missoula. FWP committed to explore this recommendation.

Submitted by: Mike Thompson

Date: May 15, 2017

Approved: Randy Arnold / May 17, 2018  
Regional Supervisor / Date

Modified by: John Vore / May 18, 2017  
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: I added the first two sentences in the response to question 2 to better explain the objective circumstance.